



Lighting Line-up



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A new look at lamp disposal

Enforcement of stricter lamp recycling guidelines creates new opportunities for electrical distributors.

BY A. LEE CHICHESTER

Guidelines for the proper disposal of mercury-containing lamps are changing across the United States. For example, as of Feb. 8, the state of California does not allow the disposal of everyday materials—such as fluorescent lamps—in trash headed for landfills (see the sidebar on p. 54). As more is learned about the dangers of mercury

contamination in the country's groundwater, rivers, streams, and air, regulators and enforcers all over the country are tightening controls on fluorescent lamp, battery, and electronic equipment disposal.

"We have definitely seen an increase in requests for service, and for information in general, about recycling spent fluorescent lamps," said Scott Beierwaltes, president of Air Cycle Corporation. "We believe the increase has been in response to the regulatory changes in California."

And the changes aren't just happening in California, although the state is doing a better job than most of educating the public. "New York recently tightened its position on disposal of mercury-containing lamps and equipment," said Beierwaltes, "and Illinois is under scrutiny because the regulations there are tighter than in many other states."

In Illinois, he explained, all nonresidential generators of spent lamps are regulated. "Historically, lamps have not been recycled at a high rate, especially in the Chicago metro area," said Beierwaltes, "but now, with growing scrutiny from the Illinois EPA [Environmental Protection Agency], they will be." He also sees the Virginia/Maryland/D.C. area as being targeted by regulators "due to a combination of heightened awareness [with respect to the Chesapeake Bay pollution] and EPA involvement," he noted.

The EPA has several programs organized to get corporate entities onto the conservation and recycling bandwagon (see below). This trend in stricter guidelines and stronger enforcement not only opens the door of opportunity to distributors, but it will also require compliance within the industry.

"The time to have a responsible recycling program in place isn't after the EPA has knocked on your door," pointed out Beierwaltes. "The time is right now to ensure that your building is in compliance, so that when inspectors come, you'll have nothing to hide."

Not surprisingly, a lot of building owners, maintenance

Osram plant recognized for joining EPA's National Partnership for Environmental Priorities

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recently recognized the Osram Sylvania fluorescent lamp plant in Versailles, Ky., for joining the National Partnership for Environmental Priorities (NPEP) and committing to significantly reduce the elemental mercury content of its linear fluorescent lamps. To learn more about Osram Sylvania's products, circle 302 on the Direct Info Card.



Jimmy Palmer (left) and Maria Parisi-Vickers (right) of the EPA present a plaque to Ron Harris, Osram plant manager.

contractors, and small business owners are asking: "If I can't throw this spent lamp in the dumpster, what do I do with it?" Some distributors are asking the same thing: "What can I do with dud or broken lamps if I can no longer pitch them into the trash?"

"We're beginning to see a lot of building managers and owners that up until now didn't know about these regulations at all," said Paul Abernathy, executive director of the Association of Lighting and Mercury Recyclers (ALMR; www.almr.org). "Now they've suddenly got to do something about their spent lamps. Who are they going to call?"

This where electrical distributors have an opportunity.

"Distributors can, at the least, be a conduit for information about the steps that must be taken to properly dispose of those lamps," said Abernathy. "It can be a profit opportunity for them as well—not only can they educate their customers, but they can also add value by becoming a drop-off point for spent lamps. And yes, they can charge for that service. Their

EPA: Helping companies to clean up their acts

The Federal Environmental Protection Agency (www.epa.gov) and state inspection, enforcement, and regulatory agencies are creating innovative outreach programs to help businesses, large and small, clean up their acts with respect to incidental environmental pollution through landfill contamination. (See individual state regulatory agency Web sites for options and incentives.)

"There is a national initiative called the Resource Conservation Challenge," explained Jim Berlow, the EPA's director of hazardous waste minimization, "that

encourages companies to find flexible, more protective ways to conserve resources through waste reduction and recovery activities."

EMCOR Facilities Services, a facilities management company headquartered in Arlington, Va., is the first such company in the EPA's mid-Atlantic Region to enroll in their voluntary National Partnership for Environmental Priorities program.

"EMCOR has stepped up to the plate," said Berlow, "by committing to develop a comprehensive mercury recycling program that can serve as a

model for other companies, including the entire property management sector across the nation."

Trammel-Crow, the top owner of commercial office space in the Northern Virginia/D.C./Maryland metro area, manages 270 properties using more than 2 million fluorescent lamps. In partnership with Esquire Environmental Services, Trammel-Crow now offers several lamp recycling options for its building managers. Trammel-Crow is also a partner in the EPA-sponsored Business for the Bay program. —A.L.C.

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contractor clients can do the same, partnering with distributors as well as recycling companies to help their clientele come into compliance with the stricter regulations."

"Right now, distributors are capitalizing on the need for good, energy-efficient lighting by selling these lamps," said Beierwaltes. "But they're leaving money on the table by not also offering their customers a solution to their need for safe disposal."

"This is a new problem that many of their customers aren't familiar with," he continued. "Distributors can educate, inform, and solve this problem, differentiating themselves from their competition. Distributors need to position themselves as offering a full life cycle program for these universal wastes."

And help is available. "Consult, protect, conserve" is the motto of Esquire Environmental Services in Virginia. The company is one of many that can help distributors help themselves—and their customers—custom fit a recycling and handling program appropriate to most any facility.

Esquire has partnered with the EPA in many programs offering incentives, recognition, and education for corporate entities to participate in outreach programs, recycling service value-adds, and progressive approaches to mercury abatement programs.

"Electrical products distributors who don't offer this kind of service to their clients are missing an opportunity to be paid twice: once for the energy-efficient fluorescent lamps themselves, and once to take the spent lamps back for proper recycling and proof of compliance with the guidelines," said Rod Kincaid of Esquire. "Anyone not doing that now, in this age of increased scrutiny, is like a shoe shop that doesn't sell polish."

Esquire Environmental has been named a 2005 Partner of the Year for the Business for the Bay program (www.chesapeakebay.net/b4bay.htm), a movement funded by the EPA to voluntarily enlist corporations into the effort to clean up the Chesapeake Bay and its watershed.

Like Esquire, many ALMR member companies will do

Myth: "No one enforces these kinds of regulations"

Last year, the Connecticut Supreme Court ruled against an appeal by three lamp manufacturers for improperly disposing of mercury-containing fluorescent bulbs.

Light Source, LCD Lighting, and LS Neon had to pay an \$857,000 penalty and also clean up two sites in the state contaminated with mercury.

Instead of sending non-functional bulbs intact to a recycler, the companies threw them into dumpsters. A state Department of Environmental Protection inspector found mercury puddled around the crusher. Inspectors also found mercury in septic systems and uncovered widespread mercury contamination in wetlands and stream sediments near the companies' manufacturing plants. —A.L.C.

whatever it takes to help distributors assist their customers with compliance.

"Recycling companies can provide the paperwork, the proper containers, the pick-up schedule, and the certificates of compliance distributors will need to help customers deal with the new guidelines," said Abernathy. "We're not too distant from the time when any small business purchaser of fluorescent lamps will have to prove that the spent lamps were properly disposed of. Otherwise, that business owner or building maintenance contractor will be held liable for improper disposal."

But who will be held responsible if a company is found to be non-compliant? Will a time come when any seller of fluorescents will also be required to offer a drop-off option for safe disposal? If so, will that seller become liable for non-compliance if his or her customer is not offered the opportunity to properly dispose of the spent lamps?

Although the issues have not yet come down the pike for the industry, mercury-containing lamp disposal is the clarion call for value-added service. This is an opportunity for distributors to satisfy that which is a real and immediate need for their customers. Compliance is simply not optional anymore. ■■■

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Temporary disposal exemptions end

Until Feb. 8, California households and some small businesses were allowed to put waste batteries, electronic devices, and fluorescent bulbs in the trash. These items, called "universal wastes," contain hazardous materials that can contaminate people or the environment if improperly disposed of.

Many governmental agencies have

programs to help answer the question, "If I can't throw this out, what do I do with it?" Private retailers will also collect certain universal wastes, such as batteries, used motor oil, and spent fluorescent lamps.

The guidelines for those who handle universal wastes are relaxed enough that with care and training, almost any business with space

enough to handle the collection process can become a drop-off center for universal wastes. Professional recycling companies can assist with expertise and materials to make the handlers' lives easier—even to create a profit center for such handling.

To find a recycling partner or for more information, go to www.almr.org. —A.L.C.